

Competition in Canada
On the Rebound

Presstin

February 1988

A 235-0-2
2/12/88

The Journal of the American Newspaper Publishers Association

How Newspapers Court Readers



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VOLUME 10, NUMBER 2

FEBRUARY 1988

Special Report To most newspapers, the leading concern continues to be READERS—finding new ones while keeping existing ones happy. For most of the past four decades, there has been a downward trend in reading frequency. However, some recent studies indicate that the decline may have bottomed out, and newspaper executives are now looking for ways to regain some of the millions of non-readers. They are paying close attention to the efforts of papers that have already dealt successfully with the readership problem. Younger readers are especially being wooed. **16**

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Minority opportunity tops our industry's agenda

Since I asked here last September for your guidance and cooperation in promoting newspaper opportunities for minorities, there has been a gratifying response. And much work.

You said you wanted full participation by minorities in all newspaper roles and ANPA should help. ANPA has made the commitment to assist—through its 1988 budget and that of the ANPA Foundation, through its new permanent Minority Opportunity Committee led by Jay Smith of the Atlanta Journal and Constitution, and through the enthusiastic work of the industry's joint task force on minorities led by David Lawrence Jr. of the Detroit Free Press. You also wanted effective tools to achieve the objective of a diversified workforce.

We can get you "how to" books, videos and literature about the excitement of newspapering to use in recruiting.

You wanted really *useful* advice and on-site help, not just more rhetoric. It is a telephone call away, from the staff experts of ANPA and other industry organizations. Talented, sensitive people can come to your offices to present programs on multicultural workforce management, in as expansive or as targeted a way as you need.

You need access to larger pools of minority applicants for entry-level and advanced jobs in all your departments. Help is available to enable you, on your own or with nearby newspapers, to conduct classy, effective, total-newspaper job fairs. Scores of job banks exist, and ANPA is helping to connect and coordinate them so they will be more effective for you.

You asked for literacy programs to enable you to help some minority people in your communities. Experts at ANPA Foundation will answer your call with down-to-earth, proven suggestions on how to lend a helping hand.

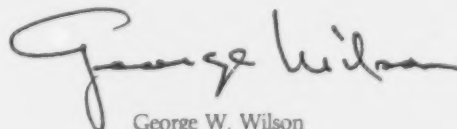
You said you needed better statistical yardsticks against which to measure your progress. That will be available when you respond next month to a new national employment survey, conducted by our Minority Opportunity Committee. We will take extraordinary measures to protect the confidentiality of your responses. You and your department managers can help by responding quickly.

You said you wanted advanced, mid-career training programs that aid our efforts to encourage minorities. They exist: at ANPA, the American Press Institute, the Washington Journalism Center, the regional and state press associations, and in individual companies' programs. ANPA Foundation sponsors a minority fellowship program if help is needed.

You expect ANPA, as an association, to do its part. Our staff is now 17-percent minorities. *Presstime* has stepped up its coverage of minority affairs. In April, ANPA's annual Convention will devote a segment of the general session to minorities in newspapers.

I also heard many of you say publishers had to pay more attention, make greater commitments, insist on more progress, design tailored programs for their employees from the resources of many supporting organizations, provide ways not words.

My observation is that you are doing those things. I don't see reluctance by America's publishers to employ and promote minorities. I see frustration that not more has happened, a desire to help and an enthusiasm to get on with it. You're doing it not because it is easy or expedient but because it is right. For newspapers and for our society.



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ANPA Chairman

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Presstime magazine (ISSN 0194-3243) is published monthly by the American Newspaper Publishers Association, 11600 Sunrise Valley Drive, Reston, Va. 22091. Basic subscription rate of \$50 a year is included in members' dues. Non-member rate is \$100 domestic, additional overseas. Second-class postage paid at Reston, Va., and additional mailing offices. Copyright 1988 by ANPA. All rights reserved. Unsolicited articles and photos should be sent to the *presstime* editor. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *presstime*, ANPA, Box 17407 Dulles Airport, Washington, D.C. 20041.



Presstime is a member of the Business Publications Audit of Circulation Inc.

BY GENE GOLTZ
presstime staff writer

The four-decades-long decline in readership continues to be the most vexing problem for most U.S. daily newspapers. Like the multi-headed Hydra of Greek mythology, it is a serpent that seemingly cannot be slain; one part of the problem is cut away, only to have others burst forth.

"Readership," says David Easterly, president of Cox Newspapers, "is the most important challenge facing the newspaper industry. We've got all kinds of people everywhere who don't read."

But after a decade of intense and often frustrating scrutiny, industry leaders now concede that the readership conundrum defies a Hercules-like solution. Instead, the focus has shifted to individual newspapers that have achieved readership gains by finding new ways to court readers.

The action now is for other papers to emulate their successes. John R. Harrison, president of The New York Times Regional Newspaper Group and chairman of the ANPA Circulation and Readership Committee, says strategies will vary from market to market. But, he says, publishers and editors everywhere should be guided by one key objective—to produce a newspaper that the local citizenry will regard as "indispensable."

In large part because of what certain innovative papers are doing on their own, spurred by industry studies and recommendations, the readership picture today is not so grim as it was in the 1970s. Several studies show that the rate of decline in newspaper readership frequency has subsided, and two research firms even report a leveling off of that decline.

Those two are Simmons Market Research Bureau Inc., which conducts massive research on newspaper readership nationwide as well as in the largest U.S. markets, and the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago.

Asking people if they had read a newspaper the previous day, Simmons found in 1970 that 78 percent said yes. The number dropped to 73 percent in 1973 and to 69 percent four years later. But the figure reported last year, 65 percent, was 2 points higher than that for 1986, and it equaled the 1984 level.

As part of a generic public-opinion study, NORC annually asks a cross-section of U.S. adults whether they read a newspaper daily. The percentage responding affirmatively decreased from 73 percent in 1967 to 55 percent last year. However, the figure has been basically stable since 1982, when the rate was 54 percent.

Gerald C. Stone, journalism professor at Memphis State University, says several other studies indicate the decline has halted. Stone in his 1987 book *Examining Readers* says the halt occurred in two stages, involving older adults in 1973-74 and ones aged 18 to 24 in the mid-1980s.

Two top researchers at the Newspaper Advertising Bureau in New York City, Leo Bogart and Albert E.

Reviving A Romance With Readers Is the Biggest Challenge For Many Newspapers

Gollin, say it's clear that newspaper readership frequency is not declining as rapidly as it was in the 1970s. However, they add, it's not certain the decline has ceased altogether.

Gollin, vice president and associate director of research, characterizes the notion of a bottoming out as being "quite close" to data available from NAB's own periodic national studies.

Bogart, executive vice president and general manager, says the "rate of decline has diminished," but this "doesn't mean it has stopped dead in its tracks. . . ." It means "things are not as bad as they were."

According to Bogart, circulation penetration among adults—that is, the number of daily newspapers sold relative to the number of people 18 years of age and older in the population—continues

to decrease but at a lesser pace. From an annual rate of 2 percent during 1970 to 1977, the decline slowed to 1.3 percent from 1977 to 1983—the years the industry ran a





A longtime loss of readership may be leveling off. Now, after years of industry-wide efforts to treat the problem, the focus is on individual newspapers. They are taking innovative approaches to build circulation and household penetration.

massive Newspaper Readership Project. Since then, from 1983 to 1987, the decline has been even slower, 0.3 percent.

But another yardstick, measuring the number of weekday papers sold per capita, gives publishers a less hopeful view, Bogart says. It shows steady slippage, from 46 papers per 100 adults in 1970, to 38 in 1980, to 37 in 1986 and to 35 per 100 last year.

SPRINGBOARD TO ACTION. Everyone agrees on one point. There's no single answer to the problem. If there were, readership would be soaring today—and, says journalism professor Stone, "We'd all be millionaires."

Myriad changes in society and in reading habits over the past four decades have contributed to the lag in readership, which has occurred even though contemporary newspapers are generally credited as being better than ever and more responsive to readers' needs.

Some of that quality and responsiveness can be traced to the \$5-million Newspaper Readership Project, which urged publishers and editors to produce newspapers that people would be hungry to read each day. Now it is increasingly being recognized that the most immediate and practical path out of the morass may be for troubled papers to study those things that have worked for high-readership newspapers and to emulate them.

For example, after "brainstorming" the readership problem last year, the 36-member ANPA Circulation and Readership Committee decided to highlight the successful readership programs of 28 newspapers that other papers might follow.

"Success Stories: Specific Ways to Gain and Retain Readers," is being prepared by Robert P. Clark, a retired vice president/news for Harte-Hanks Newspapers who was chairman of the Research Committee of the Readership Project.

The new publication, scheduled for release this spring, is an effort to present ways to implement a 1986 study by NAB's Future of Advertising Project,

"Readers: How to Gain and Retain Them." That study presented a road map for publishers, a way to think about the problem.

"The array of circumstances facing publishers is so vast and different that every newspaper must chart its own course, tailored to fit its own needs," wrote Burl Osborne, president and editor of The Dallas Morning News and, with Baltimore Sun President and Publisher Reg Murphy, a principal author of the report.

While such efforts as those delineated in "Success Stories" continue, another view of the readership picture will emerge in April with the scheduled release of another major FOA Project report. It will relate to 1977 and 1982 NAB studies and tell how different groups are using newspapers (or not using them), analyze the implications of those findings, and show how the data can be translated into actions.

Although individual approaches differ, one common to all of the successful high-readership papers is that they are courting readers and potential readers as never before. Consider that:

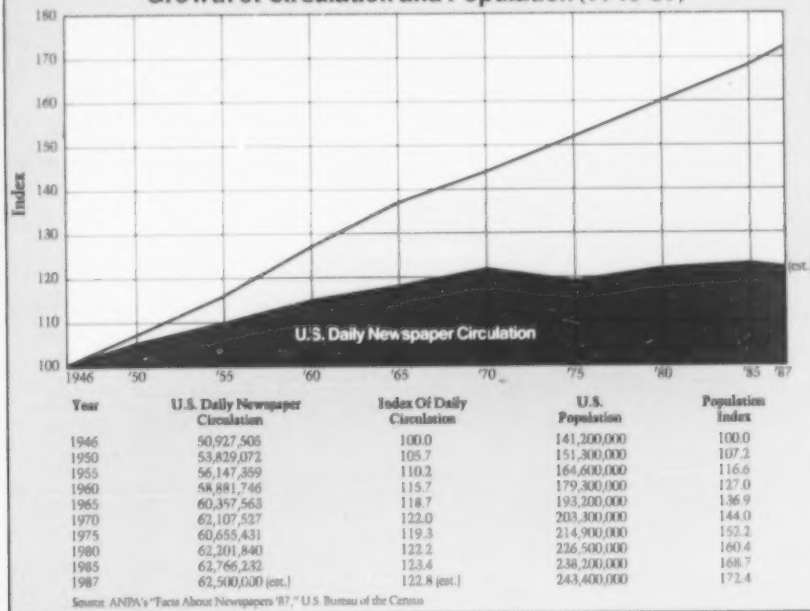
- 69 percent of U.S. and Canadian daily and Sunday/weekend newspapers (representing 82 percent of overall circulation) changed the nature of their editorial content since 1983, according to a 1987 Newspaper Inventory Survey by NAB. The three most frequent changes were increased business coverage by 53 percent, increased sports coverage by 45 percent, and increased ratio of state and local to national and international news by 35 percent.

- 82 percent of newspapers changed graphics or layout since 1983, including the use of more run-of-paper color, different typefaces and industry-standard column widths.

- Many papers now have a daily meeting of all department heads to ensure that the reader is being well-served by every aspect of the newspaper operation—that the stories are written and edited well, that the printing quality is high, and that the circulation service is good. One of the papers doing this is The Dallas Morning News. President and Editor Osborne notes that this is a drastic change from previous years when the editorial department would rarely communicate with circulation, advertising or some other departments. "This has been a tremendous help," he says. "It allows us to adjust our activity on a daily basis."



Growth of Circulation and Population (1946-87)



REASONS FOR DECLINE. If daily newspaper circulation had increased in proportion to the U.S. population between 1946 and 1987, there would be 25 million more readers today. In other words, a 72-percent increase in the nearly 51-million daily newspaper readers of 1946 would have resulted in more than 87 million readers today, rather than the actual figure of about 62.5 million. (See graph, above.)

There are multiple reasons for the loss of readers.

Time-related problems was the leading cause cited by respondents to a 1987 survey, "Love Us and Leave Us," conducted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Forty percent of people who had quit subscribing said they had no time to read, an almost equal percentage said the papers kept piling up before they were read, and 30 percent said there were

times when they had not read one issue of the paper before the next one was delivered.

Next came delivery problems. Three in 10 of those who had stopped the paper said they were fed up with late or bad deliveries. People also cited billing problems, the cost of the paper and the perception that they were obtaining enough news and other information from television and radio.

The least frequent reason given was dislike for the contents of the paper.

If people do not have time to read the paper, they apparently have plenty of time for television. The A.C. Nielsen Co. says its research shows that the average American home has a TV set on for 6.6 hours a day.

The growth of television has paralleled the decline of newspaper reading. In 1946 the United States lifted wartime restrictions on manufacturing of home television sets, and by 1949 a million sets were in use. By 1987, U.S. Census Bureau figures show, 89.1 million of the nation's 90 million homes had at least one television set.

Circulation and population figures show that daily newspaper penetration averaged just over 1.3 newspapers per household in 1946. It has declined to about 0.7 today.

Yet many studies have found that

watching TV news and other television programming actually enhances newspaper reading. "These findings," Stone says in *Examining Newspapers*, "strongly suggest television was not the culprit" in the decline of newspaper reading.

Other suggested causes for the decline, cited by numerous analysts, include illiteracy, a mobile society which has little identification with a local community, and broadened opportunity for social activities other than staying home and reading the paper.

So who are the readers? The Casale Scale, a readership formula developed for Media and Opinion Research, identifies the most faithful ones as those who have resided longest in the community, older people, those with a household income of \$50,000 or more, registered voters, the highly educated, married

There Are Plenty of Ideas on How to Gain Readers

Some of the numerous studies, books and reports suggesting what newspapers can do to build readership include the following:

- "Creative Marketing Strategies to Win Readers and Advertisers," an executive summary of a conference for senior newspaper executives held in October 1986. Copies are available at no charge from the ANPA Public Affairs Department, The Newspaper Center, Box 17407 Dulles Airport, Washington, D.C. 20041; (703) 648-1117.
- "Circulation Management and Marketing," a March 1987 report of a task force of the ANPA Circulation and

Readership Committee. Copies are available at no charge from the ANPA Public Affairs Department.

- Three publications that are outgrowths of the Newspaper Advertising Bureau's Future of Advertising Project. Copies of "Readers: How to Gain and Retain Them" (\$5 each), "Promoting Circulation Sales: An Analysis of 15 Newspaper Circulation Retention Strategies" (\$3.25 each), and "Measuring Retention and Circulation Sales Effectiveness" (no charge) are available from the NAB Promotion Department (attention Michelle L. Craddock), 1180 Avenue of the

Americas, New York, N.Y. 10036; (212) 921-5080.

- "Love Us and Leave Us: New Subscribers One Year Later," an April 1987 report of the Readership and Research Committee of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Copies are \$7.50 each from ASNE, P.O. Box 17004, Washington, D.C. 20041; (703) 620-6087.

- "Relating to Readers in the '80s," a 1984 study by Clark, Martire & Bartolomeo Inc., commissioned by ASNE and funded by United Press International. Copies are \$6 each and available from ASNE.

people, and those most interested in community news. The formula was developed by Anthony M. Casale, director of Media and Opinion Research, a division of the Gordon S. Black Corp. of Rochester, N.Y.

HOW SOME PAPERS ATTRACT READERS. Although researchers agree generally on who does and who does not read the paper, they do not always agree on why the non-readers do not read, or how to attract them. A broad spectrum of effort exists among newspapers today on how to lure the elusive reader.

"Success Stories," the forthcoming ANPA report, found that successful newspapers usually mount a concerted effort in all departments and have a working policy of interdepartmental cooperation. But they also pay careful attention to local needs and demographics. Here are some examples from papers whose efforts have paid off in high readership:

- The Mesa (Ariz.) Tribune (morning, circulation 38,367), whose readership is heavily populated with senior citizens, produces a weekly section titled "Tribune Plus." It features senior citizens' activities, syndicated material from Maturity News Service, and articles on travel and health.

- The Des Moines Register (morning, 214,306) capitalizes on its statewide circulation—and promotes statewide readership—by selecting 10 top students for its Iowa Academic All-State Team. The 1987 winners were selected from 435 high school seniors nominated by their principals. A 12-page section carried stories and pictures about the top 10, plus 52 regional winners.

- The Escondido (Calif.) Times-Advocate (evening, 44,007) pays extra attention to local news by running a daily "Our Town" page that contains vital statistics, academic honors and a feature called "Neighbors," for which readers are encouraged to suggest ideas.

- The Riverside (Calif.) Press-Enterprise (morning, 138,092) goes out of its way to keep subscribers happy. After signing up new subscribers with a seven-day, free-sample offer, the newspaper offers a 60-day money-back guarantee if the customer is not satisfied. Thank-you cards are sent to verify the subscription, and the cards produce useful comments and suggestions, according to Circulation Director Jack T. Koehler.

The newspaper also goes a step further than most by publishing an annual letter to readers at the first of each year. In this year's letter, Editor and Publisher Howard H. (Tim) Hays told readers about the new \$40-million newspaper production plant under construction, discussed the expanded news and sports coverage for outlying areas, and reminded readers that the \$5.50 subscription price, one of the lowest for newspapers of that size in the United States, had not been raised during 1987.

These four newspapers were part of the group selected for inclusion in "Success Stories," but it is not difficult to find tales of success at many other newspapers around the country.

For instance, all of the papers in The New York Times Regional Newspaper Group are enjoying circulation increases that have continued unabated for the past 10 years. Philip K. Hanna, vice president of group circulation, says that circulation increases at the regional dailies have run about 4 percent or more each year for the past 10.

The Times now has 26 dailies and nine non-dailies in 10 states. In half of those states, Hanna says, a Times paper led the state in circulation increases for the 12 months ending Sept. 30, 1987. Total circulation for all 35 regional Times papers increased during the past calendar year by 3.6 percent, to 848,000, he says.

Seymour Topping, director of editorial development for The New York Times Co., says, "We have found in every case that if we improve the quality of the product, get the papers delivered

Improving quality, delivering the papers on time and promoting circulation have paid off in every case.

Seymour Topping
The New York Times Co.

on time and energetically promote circulation, we can improve circulation" numbers.

He emphasizes, though, that each of the group's newspapers must address its particular local needs. "The last thing we want to do is create little New York Timeses."

In August 1986 the New York Times Regional Group commissioned Minnesota Opinion Research Inc. to do a study on how to attract marginal readers and non-readers. (See story, p. 22.) The results of that research are still being applied to many of the Times' regional newspapers, but already, says Mary L. Holdt, group designer, "incredible results" have been achieved.

The Leesburg (Fla.) Daily Commercial, for instance, has enjoyed dramatic circulation increases. In the two years preceding Sept. 30, 1987, the evening newspaper's circulation rose from 17,505 daily and 19,693 Sunday to 24,796 and 28,093, respectively, according to Audit Bureau of Circulations FAS-FAX figures.

That was only the beginning. After a complete redesign last fall, the paper's circulation rose to 30,805 daily and 32,414 Sunday by the end of December, says Publisher E. A. Nichols Jr.

"Circulation just absolutely went nuts after we redesigned," he says.

Coupled with the new look was additional editorial content. "The newshole was expanded, and we run a minimum of four sections in the paper every day," Nichols says. Greater efforts are being made to give ample coverage to world, national, state and local news, and the Daily Commercial's editorial staff has been enlarged from 24 to 38.

Another Times regional newspaper, the morning Spartanburg (S.C.) Herald-Journal, increased circulation from 47,661 to 55,404 daily, and from 51,997 to 59,294 Sunday in the same 1985-87 period. Publisher David O. Roberts says, "We became very aggressive in circulation. We became very active contacting customers door-to-door and by telephone.

"We've cleaned up our distribution lines in terms of getting the product to the customer on time. I think that went a long way toward assuring people they would have good, dependable, long-time delivery. I think that in itself stopped a lot of normal cancellations. In promotion, we used a lot of other media. We were particularly heavy in outdoor and radio advertising, and we used television to explain our format changes."

Like the Leesburg daily, the Herald-Journal also "dramatically rearranged and revitalized the reader content," Roberts says. "It was a total change, based on what the news management thought the product should be locally. . . . I think the real key is that we organized the paper in such a way that the reader has gotten completely comfortable about where the news is located."

The Herald-Journal also increased the size of its reporting staff—from 36 to 54—and "tremendously expanded" the newshole, according to Executive Editor Carl E. Beck Jr. Both he and Roberts say the newspaper is following a policy that editorial matter will never occupy less than 50 percent of the

Special Report



Telemarketing personnel help maintain strong circulation of The Pueblo (Colo. Chieftain).

John Jacques, The Pueblo Chieftain

newshole, excluding ad inserts. Roberts says most newspapers average a newshole of about 37 percent.

Beck says all of the syndicated columnists were reviewed; some were canceled and new ones instituted. The paper added an op-ed page plus a religion page, "very popular in the South," he observes.

The increased circulation was accomplished, Roberts says with great satisfaction, without gimmicks. "We have not discounted a single subscription." Furthermore, the paper did not have to expand its geographical reach to pick up more circulation. Roberts says he believes that if a publishing company has a high-quality newspaper and makes readers aware of its worth, they will be eager to subscribe.

The Spartanburg publisher believes those precepts can help other newspapers to staunch declining readership. "I don't care if it's Greenville or Charlotte or anybody in the country," he says, "individually or collectively, we're all in this together."

MORE SUCCESS STORIES. Some newspapers continue to do exceptionally well in defiance of some of the conventional wisdom about readership. The Buffalo News is such a paper.

For one thing, the 311,757-circulation News is a highly successful afternoon paper in an era when the trend is toward morning publication. The News outlasted the morning Courier-Express in a fierce battle that ended with the Courier-Express' demise in 1982. The News' only concession to the a.m. cycle is a street-sales-only "Sunrise" edition.

Even more notable is its high rate of household penetration. ABC figures show that the News reaches 78 percent of the 244,200 households in its city zone. It is one of just 206 dailies to have penetration of 75 percent or more, and most of them are much smaller papers, according to a *presstime* analysis of ABC data. (Morning/evening combination papers were counted as one unit.) Five hundred sixty-nine newspapers were in the 50-74-percent range as of Sept. 30, 1987, while 251 had city-zone penetration of less than 50 percent.

The News has achieved high penetration even though Buffalo

is predominantly a blue-collar city, not one heavily populated with the college-educated, high-income people that research has shown are the most faithful newspaper readers.

Executives of the newspaper say their formula for success consists of three main ingredients: a good product, meticulous attention to home delivery and a strong reading habit among Buffalo residents.

Like his counterparts in Spartanburg and Leesburg, News President and Publisher Stanford Lipsey points to the generous amount of space given to editorial content—usually about 50 percent of the product. He also says the paper's many sections and its specifically tailored news for different parts of the circulation area contribute to reader loyalty.

Circulation Director David P. Perona says that when people arrive home in the evening from work, "the newspaper is there waiting for them." Not only that, but the copy has been hand-delivered inside the storm door, no papers are just thrown onto the porch or onto driveways. This exceptional level of service keeps subscribership high, he says.

Perona adds that "Buffalo people are locked into the reading habit." Families tend to be stable, he says, and this builds readership from one generation to another. He also notes that much of

the population is represented by people of Polish, Italian and Irish descent, and Buffalo residents have many close personal relationships with one another. "Buffalo is a unique city, (with) a small-town atmosphere in a big city. It's very clannish." People in Buffalo want to know what is going on in their community, he says.

Not even an economic decline in the area has dampened their enthusiasm for the newspaper. When a big Bethlehem Steel plant closed two years ago, there were layoffs and an exodus of workers from the area, but Perona says overall circulation held fast.

Another example of a large-city circulation success story may be taking shape at The Hartford Courant (morning, 226,319). That newspaper is acting to build its circulation base in six suburban "target markets."

The first one selected, north central Connecticut, was the beneficiary of an expanded news, advertising and circulation campaign that began in September 1985. There were subscription campaigns, such as half-price introductory offers. Newspaper carriers were given \$15 for each news tip that resulted in a story. The Courant also sponsored concerts, Fourth of July celebrations, community breakfasts attended by editors and town fairs.

At the end of two years, daily circulation in the target area had increased by 31 percent, from 14,977 to 19,632, according to the Courant's circulation department. That increase of 4,655 copies accounted for most of the 5,158-copy gain reported for the entire Courant in the two-year period.

With the growth in circulation has come an increase in advertising in the north central area. It grew 11 percent in 1987, says M.J. Smith, a former assistant state editor at The Times Mirror Co. daily who is now associate publisher for the north-central target market.

Five other target markets have been similarly identified and marked for expansion, with their own zoned editions. In all, 60 reporters have been added to the editorial staff to cover the many town meetings and municipal events in the small communities that characterize Connecticut.

"Connecticut is a little different from a lot of other places," Smith says. "Lots of people work in Hartford, but they identify with their own suburban community. There's been a joke sometimes that we need a zoned edition for every town in Connecticut."

Courant Publisher Michael J. Davies, a former editor in Kansas City, Mo., and Louisville, says he made a conscious decision to intensify the circulation effort soon after he arrived at the Courant in 1983. "Even though Connecticut is an affluent state," he says, "it has a very low rate of household growth. So we can't rely on an increasing population as the Florida papers do. We have to go out and scrap for our circulation."

In the more sparsely populated inland West, some newspapers have to travel quite a distance to carry on a courtship for readership. Take the Pueblo (Colo.) Chieftain (morning, 50,385). Its circulation region sprawls about 200 miles by 100 miles—a rectangle in south-central and southeastern Colorado that is four times bigger than the entire state of Connecticut. This requires, says President and Publisher Robert H. Rawlings, complete coverage of international, national, regional and local news.

"We have a strong local and regional news report, and a strong sports report," Rawlings says. This is one of the reasons, he says, for the Chieftain's high rate of household penetration in its city zone—76 percent.

In Pueblo as in Spartanburg, the publisher emphasizes that the strong circulation is accomplished without discounts or freebies. "We have tried the gimmicks," Rawlings says. "They may work temporarily, but we find they don't work for us in the long run. So we just emphasize sales, service and a good news report, and that works better."

Stringent standards and training for the corps of mostly youth carriers has kept the rate of customer complaints below 1 percent, he reports, and this in turn has led to a low rate of subscriber turnover or churn.

Also concentrating on churn and on building household penetration is The Evansville (Ind.) Courier (morning, 63,904). The Scripps Howard daily is using a "model district" system built around the theory that a manager in the circulation department should have intimate knowledge of his or her customers. Under the model-district system, each circulation route is analyzed down to the last apartment.

The system was developed by Scripps Howard consultant Ray F. Mack and first tried last year under the guidance of Richard J. Thomas, Courier metro home delivery manager, who added variations to fit market needs. Circulation District 12, consisting of 39 paper routes with penetration varying from 16 to 60 percent, was selected for the initial test.

The newspaper gathered data about households in the district from such sources as the U.S. Census Bureau and the public library, plus their own circulation files. Those identified as non-subscribing were contacted and given a sales pitch.

Conversely, the newspaper can avoid bothering those already subscribing. "You're wasting your time with sequence dialing" of random telephone numbers, Thomas says, while running the risk of hearing someone say, "You guys keep calling me and I'm going to stop taking the paper."

In his model-district study, Thomas also found that some routes were too long. Any that took more than 45 minutes to deliver, he determined, resulted in higher-than-average carrier turnover. And higher turnover invariably resulted in customer dissatisfaction and eventual loss of subscribers. This information resulted in the splitting of several large routes into smaller ones.

The model-district concept was put into practice at the start

An overriding concern is how to transform people 18-35 into the same kind of habitual newspaper readers their parents and grandparents were.

of 1987, and at the end of the first five months, service errors had declined 32 percent, he says.

The trial also disclosed that where customers were billed through the mail and paid in advance, penetration was higher and churn was down. Thomas is studying whether the same billing technique will increase subscriber retention in other areas.

The system is continuing to be refined. Thomas says once all the information is analyzed, the newspaper will be able to set up realistic sales goals for carriers and district managers and to develop long-range circulation strategies. It also will be used for The Evansville Press, whose circulation and other business functions are handled by the Courier under a joint operating arrangement.

"The model-district plan," he says, "is the map by which newspaper circulation will travel into the next century."

HOW TO SNARE THE YOUNG. If there is one overriding concern in newspaper readership today, it is how to transform people in the 18-35 age bracket into the same kind of steady, habitual daily newspaper readers their parents and grandparents were.

Stone of Memphis State University writes in his new book that researchers have found these as some of the reasons younger people do not read a newspaper: It is considered to be an "old people's habit"; the newspaper is seen "as speaking for the status quo and being against change in society"; it is "cold and impersonal"; and it is "a middle-aged product written and edited by middle-aged people for a middle-aged audience."

John K. Hartman, assistant professor of journalism at Central Michigan University, believes newspapers can increase readership among younger people by adopting the flair and style of USA Today. Hartman says members of the "television generation" are more attracted to the color, graphics and short, snappy stories of the Gannett Co. national daily than they are to conventional newspapers with "black ink on white paper."

Many local dailies are, in fact, using more color and graphics, partly as an effort to attract younger readers. Other approaches are also being tried.

Columbia (S.C.) Newspapers Inc., publisher of The



Special Report

State and the Columbia Record, is concluding a two-year "Yuppie Campaign" based entirely on marketing. It involved a series of television ads coinciding with in-house newspaper promotion ads aimed at "young, upwardly mobile professionals."

The series of ads "featured a 'Yuppie' who's trying to get ahead," says Barbara C. Whittington, marketing research manager. "The gist of the ads was that they'd get ahead faster and better if they read the newspaper."

The campaign appears to be paying off, particularly in Sunday readership among young people in the Columbia area. While combined morning and evening circulation of the two Knight-Ridder Inc. dailies rose from 146,802 to 147,764 in the 24 months prior to Sept. 30, 1987, Sunday circulation of The State climbed from 149,462 to 153,515. Moreover, the 1987 Simmons Major Market Research report showed that 77.6 percent of people 18-24 read the most recent edition of the Sunday paper, compared with 67.5 percent of people in that age group two years earlier. Among those between the ages of 25 and 34, the increase was even more dramatic—from 67.8 percent to 84.6 percent. "It appears," Executive Vice President and General Manager R. Sidney Crim told employees in a recent report, "our so-called 'Yuppie' campaign has been successful."

The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, a group of 12 twice-a-week suburban newspapers published in communities around Detroit, made an editorial adjustment to woo 18-to-34-year-olds. A "Street Scene" section in Monday editions specializes in articles of interest to younger people: why the Beta format is losing out to VHS in the home videocassette market, how to buy a new "stripped down" car without expensive options, and how laser-powered holograms are entering the 3-D market. Each issue also contains a full page of music news, including the latest on local rock bands. A generous amount of space is given to sports, movie reviews, and columns on subjects such as how

young widows are coping and how to behave in the first job interview.

Susan M. Mason, "Street Scene" coordinator, says editorial ideas are generated by a committee consisting of newspaper staff members in the 18-to-34 age group, plus staffers of other ages who may wish to offer ideas. Sales "have perked up" since the special section was introduced, she says.

Even as they stalk elusive young people, newspapers are not forgetting the folks who continue to make newspapers the nation's leading medium for news and advertising—people over 35. One indicator of that is the success of the new Maturity News Service. And, of course, the much-heralded maturing of the "baby boomers" has long been seen as a potential big boost for newspaper readership that, it seems, always is right around the corner.

Publishers and editors are also watching other demographic patterns for telltale signs that the readership decline might someday be reversed. They are wondering whether there will be a slowdown in the formation of non-family households, which in general have a poor record of newspaper subscribership. The number of such households in the United States increased from less than 8 million in 1960 to about 25 million in 1987. In making its projections, the U.S. Census Bureau charts three different scenarios leading to wildly different numbers for the year 2000: 28 million, 34 million and 40 million.

But whatever happens demographically, there is no question that newspapers can attract more readers if they make the right effort, says Osborne of The Dallas Morning News.

"There's no free lunch," he says. "If you are willing to publish and deliver a newspaper product people feel they want and must read, then they'll buy it. . . . The newspaper will move up on the list of priorities in their lives. If reading the paper is more important than watching another 30 minutes of TV, then that's what they'll do." □

Ten 'Keys for Attracting Readers'

MORI Research of Minneapolis has developed a checklist of 10 "keys for attracting readers to newspapers." Using that 10-point list as a foundation, MORI and The New York Times Regional Newspaper Group compiled a 56-page booklet giving examples of how newspapers have courted readers.

The "keys," plus selected examples for each, suggest that newspapers provide:

Utility, or useful information. The Chicago Tribune publishes a weekly "Sports Weekend" page summarizing the upcoming weekend's professional and top college sporting events.

A frame of reference, to help people better understand news stories and even become more familiar with the newspaper itself. The Philadelphia Daily News publishes a column called "The Savvy Reader" that helps explain the news in simpler ways to help people who have "marginal reading ability."

Local ties. These can be highlighted

through zoned editions, summaries of local events such as a column called "Who, what, when, where, why" published by The Ledger of Lakeland, Fla., and features on local communities such as the Seattle Post-Intelligencer's "Neighborhood Profiles."

Multiple points of entry, or the "liberal use of pictures, graphics and sidebars" to "attract readers to stories who might otherwise skip over them." A story in the St. Petersburg Times on the baby boomers' future "retirement crunch" was illustrated with two large graphics that clearly presented key facts from the story.

A quick read by using devices such as capsules and indexes. The Oregonian of Portland runs story summaries in a "News in brief" column that doubles as an index. The Bakersfield Californian offers a "Week in Review" column providing perspective on the previous week's news.

More escape, or upbeat material designed to give people "a lift or [to] take

their minds off problems." A "nostalgia" story in the San Jose Mercury News on classic cars, headlined "Chrome Sweet Chrome," was one such feature.

Grist for conversation, stories to give people something to talk about. A humorous piece in The Charlotte (N.C.) Observer discussed the possibility of uniting the Carolinas into one state, "New Carolina."

Must reading to reach people in high socioeconomic brackets, even though the stories may have low general appeal. Included are such things as sharp, local business reporting as appears in The Sun of San Bernardino, Calif., and software reviews in The Tampa Tribune.

Tone that matches content through writing and graphics. The Milwaukee Journal's "Green Sheet for kids" makes liberal use of cartoons, sketches and photographs.

Broadly based features tailored to local interests. The Star Tribune of Minneapolis carries a "Variety" feature page containing stories on wide-ranging topics.